

VOICES OF AMERICA

SHOULD U.S. SEEK QADHAFI'S OVERTHROW?

Interview with Michael Ledeen, Georgetown Center
for Strategic and International Studies

PRO

Q Mr. Ledeen, why do you favor covert efforts by the United States to overthrow Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi?

Because when you have a serious challenge—in this case, the phenomenon of state-sponsored terrorism—you must deal with the state sponsoring it.

Qadhafi has made his desire to destroy the Western World quite explicit. He supports all kinds of terror to that end. It would be much easier to have a restrained attitude if he were the only one doing this and if the attacks at the airports in Rome and Vienna were isolated incidents. But they're part of a growing pattern of attacks against American and Western interests.

Q What about the danger that we might end up with a regime even more pro-Soviet and more extreme than Qadhafi's?

If indeed the only alternatives in a place like Libya were Qadhafi or something worse, then the option I'm talking about would not exist. But Libya is in shambles internally, with Qadhafi surrounded by East German bodyguards. There must be a certain number of Libyans who would rather have a civilized country in which wealth is spent for the citizenry rather than for murder.

Q If the U.S. government were to take action against Qadhafi, wouldn't it establish a free-for-all atmosphere, inviting the Soviets to do the same to regimes that they don't like?

This is the kind of false symmetry that's generally cited against those who, like me, call for supporting democratic revolutions. In fact, the Soviets are already subverting governments all over the world; it is an explicit part of their foreign policy. We should support democratic movements against dictatorships; that's a basic problem with our foreign policy.

Q Does the United States have the means to orchestrate events to that extent?

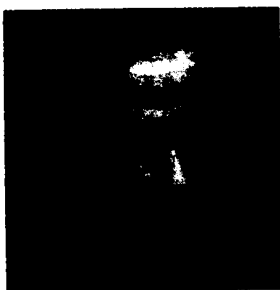
We have the means. It's a question of whether we have the will and the discipline. The will requires making a decision to do this; the discipline means keeping secrets.

Q If we help overthrow governments, isn't that betraying the ideals we want to protect?

To a certain kind of intellectual, it seems legitimate to call for the overthrow of the governments of South Africa or the Philippines, whereas it is not legitimate to call for the overthrow of our enemies.

Indeed, one must be careful that our means aren't as barbaric as those of our enemies. I am not talking about assassination, for example, or intervention by U.S. forces. But what we need to do is give our friends the means to fight their own battles. Surely, many Libyans would prefer a more civilized regime.

YES — He "has made his desire to destroy the Western World quite explicit"



LINDA L. CREIGHTON—USNEWS

CON

Interview with George Ball,
former under secretary of state

Q Mr. Ball, why do you oppose the U.S.'s overthrowing Qadhafi?

I see no point in it. We're beyond the stage of civilization where international conflict is settled by the assassination of rulers, and we have no business messing around trying to overthrow governments just because we don't like them. History shows that almost always when we've done that we've put something worse in its place. So-called reprisals are just a response to terror with terror, which only perpetuates an escalating cycle of terror.

Q Isn't Qadhafi a major threat to American interests?

He's a bloody nuisance. To say he is a major threat is an enormous exaggeration. He is not master of a country that has great resources. We're building him up. I can't think of anything that would encourage Qadhafi more than this publicity we're giving him. We're making him look like a world figure when he's a pipsqueak.

Q What would you say to the argument that Qadhafi is so far beyond the norm of international behavior—as was Idi Amin, for example—that the usual prohibitions don't apply?

NO — U.S. should not "try to overthrow governments because we don't like them"



PETER BYRON FOR USNEWS

I heard that argument in Hitler's day, and there was always a suggestion that somehow we should arrange the assassination of Hitler. Once you start down that road, you simply legitimize the most primitive kind of tactics. We should not forget the old adage that murder breeds murder.

Q Doesn't this affect our credibility? Can the U.S. allow Qadhafi to sponsor terrorism and subversion with impunity?

I don't think it affects American credibility. American credibility is on the line only when the President of the United States spends a week yammering about it and making threats he's not going to carry out. All this excitement about terrorism has become obsessive. Let me say that when I make that remark I'm trying to put this in some kind of perspective. We should understand that terrorism springs from certain causes and we ought to deal with the causes.

Q And those causes are—

We are subject to these attacks by the extremist Arabs because we've taken a totally one-sided role in the Mideast. We've shown absolutely no sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians, who have enormous frustrations. U.S. Mideast policy is largely made in Jerusalem, and the net result is to escalate violence and bring discredit to our role.

Q Even if some Palestinians would accept a West Bank and Gaza state, wouldn't rejectionists like Abu Nidal, who is backed by Qadhafi, do everything in their power to sabotage it?

There are rejectionists on both sides. In Israel God knows there are rejectionists who are loud and vigorous.